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Skinhead culture: the ideologies, mythologies, religions and conspiracy theories of racist skinheads

JOHN POLLARD

ABSTRACT Groups of racist skinheads now constitute a significant element of the global radical right. The British youth subculture of the late 1960s has thus been transformed into a worldwide social movement, the violent cutting-edge of white supremacist resistance to multiculturalism. Pollard examines the historical development of the racist skinhead phenomenon and, in particular, analyses the origins, nature and development of the ideas that inspire it: the foundational myth; ‘skinhead, a way of life’; Odinism or paganism; the skinhead as *victim*; skinheads as a vanguard of white, male, working-class revolutionaries; National Socialism and antisemitism; and, above all, racialism.

KEYWORDS conspiracy theories, ideology, myths, race, racialism, religion, skinheads, white power music, white supremacy, youth subculture

The skinhead phenomenon has gone from being a noisy and visible, if marginal, working-class youth subculture in Britain to constituting a significant element in the transnational far right, a social movement possessing a culture or ideologies of its own. This article identifies and analyses the key components of skinhead culture, tracing their sources and their development over the last thirty years or so, and considering the extent of their acceptance. In doing so, it will interpret the term ‘ideologies’ very generously, which is particularly appropriate when dealing with skinhead groups. Some ideological components are very basic ideas—race, white power and so on—while others are more complex and sophisticated. Some are quite simply confused or even contradictory. Myths and mythologies and religious beliefs are also central to skinhead culture. Some of these ideas are shared with other sectors of the extreme right while others are distinctively ‘skinhead’ in nature, as follows:

I should like to thank ‘Dave’ (not his real name) for inspiring me to write this article by sharing his memories of Blood & Honour gigs in the 1990s and early 2000s, and by giving me access to the printed materials and artefacts he accumulated at the time. Thanks also to Nathaniël Kunkeler who did a brilliant job of indexing the run of *Blood & Honour* magazine.

- the foundational myth
- 'skinhead, a way of life'
- Odinism or paganism
- the skinhead as *victim*
- skinheads as a vanguard of white, male, working-class revolutionaries
- post-war National Socialism
- racialism and antisemitism

It is useful to note that, in the matter of culture and ideology, racist (fascist, neo-Nazi or white power) skinheads wear their hearts on their sleeves, so to speak.¹ This can take the form of T-shirts, the colour of their boot laces and braces, their jewellery, jacket patches and pins, and, above all, their tattoos: their ideologies are inked on to their bodies.² Almost all of the ideological components of skinhead culture discussed here are therefore on visual display, in some shape or form, when racist skinheads gather together.

This article is based on an examination of a variety of sources: British, American, Italian and Portuguese skinzines, most especially *Blood & Honour*, the publication of the eponymous neo-Nazi rock music network; a range of extreme-right websites; the lyrics of white power music; some newspaper and periodical material, especially *Searchlight* and other anti-fascist magazines in Belgium, France, Germany and Italy; and a selection of relevant secondary literature. Inevitably, the fascist and anti-fascist sources blatantly, and sometimes stridently, contradict each other, while some of the secondary literature is of questionable 'scientific' quality. In addition, I visited several fascist organizations in Italy, attended their meetings and demonstrations, and also attended white power (or what Italians call 'Nazi-rock') gigs, and interviewed participants at gigs both in Britain and Italy.³

The skinhead subculture

The skinhead subculture emerged in the United Kingdom in 1968–9, probably in London and Southeast England. John Clarke is more specific; he claims it

- 1 Not all skinheads are right-wing or racist, like S.H.A.R.P. (Skinheads against Racial Prejudice), R.A.S.H. (Red Action Skinheads, often anarchists) or 'red skins' and gay skins: many members of these groups would deny that racist skinheads are actually skinheads at all and call them, derisively, 'boneheads', an appellation that some racist skinheads have appropriated, in the way that some African American males now call themselves 'niggers' or some gays use the term 'queer' about themselves.
- 2 There is a useful selection of illustrations of skinhead tattoos, patches and pins in Matthew Collins and Gerry Gable (eds), *Signs of Hate* (Ilford: Searchlight Information Services 2003).
- 3 An extremely useful introduction to this subject is John M. Cotter, 'Sounds of hate: white power rock and roll and neo-Nazi skinhead subculture', *Terrorism and Political Violence*, vol. 11, no. 2, 1999, 111–40.

was the East End of London and that, 'like most other youth cultural phenomena, [the skinheads] were originally a self-generated movement'.⁴ The subculture then experienced a revival in the early to mid-1970s, when it cut its teeth, so to speak, in street fights with other youth subcultures, such as the mods, and biker gangs like the rockers and Hells Angels, or on the terraces of football stadia.⁵ It was also in the 1970s that the subculture spread geographically across most of Britain, largely 'through face to face interaction among the fans at football matches'.⁶ Skinheads first appeared in the media in newspaper reports and pulp fiction.⁷

The link between skinheads and football hooliganism is an interesting one. There is ample evidence regarding the participation of skinheads in the hooligan gangs of various football clubs in the early 1970s, such as Manchester United,⁸ Middlesbrough,⁹ and West Ham.¹⁰ A little over twenty years ago, Valerio Marchi wrote that the football stadium was the ideal terrain 'in which to cultivate that culture of intolerance... based on the bonehead mode'.¹¹ While football terraces remain a major recruiting ground for the racist right as a whole in Holland, Germany, Italy and Eastern European countries like Poland and the Ukraine, the specific skinhead connection is much less clear than it once was. But one source suggests: 'As in Western European countries, Russian skinhead violence often dovetails with soccer

- 4 John Clarke, 'Football hooliganism and the skinheads', *Stencilled Occasional Papers*, no. 42, Department of Cultural Studies, University of Birmingham, January 1973, 14, available on the *University of Birmingham* website at www.birmingham.ac.uk/Documents/college-artslaw/history/cccs/stencilled-occasional-papers/1to8and11to24and38to48/SOP42.pdf (viewed 1 September 2016). See also John Clarke, 'The skinheads and the magical recovery of community', in Stuart Hall and Tony Jefferson (eds), *Resistance through Rituals: Youth Subcultures in Post-War Britain* (London: HarperCollins Academic 1976), 99–102; and George Marshall, *The Spirit of '69: A Skinhead Bible* (Dunoon: S.T. Publishing 1994), 29–32.
- 5 Garry Bushell, *Hoolies: The Stories of Britain's Biggest Street Battles* (London: John Blake Publishing 2010), 26.
- 6 Clarke, 'Football hooliganism and the skinheads', 14.
- 7 See, for example, Richard Allen, *Skinhead* (London: New English Library 1970). Allen wrote half a dozen novels about his skinhead anti-heroes between 1970 and 1977; for an illuminating analysis of his skinhead fiction, see Murray Healy, *Gay Skins: Class, Masculinity and Queer Appropriation* (London: Cassell 1996), 87–98.
- 8 Nick Lowles and Andy Nicholls, *Hooligans: The A–L of Britain's Football Hooligan Gangs* (Preston: Milo 2005), 314–15.
- 9 Nick Lowles and Andy Nicholls, *Hooligans: The M–Z of Britain's Football Hooligan Gangs* (Preston: Milo Books 2005), 72–3.
- 10 *Ibid.*, 515. See Marshall, *Spirit of '69*, 30, for skinhead 'firms' at Everton, Leeds and Liverpool.
- 11 Valerio Marchi (ed.), *Blood and Honour: rapporto internazionale sulla destra skinhead* (Rome: Koiné Edizioni 1993), 134–5. *Blood and Honour* and another of Marchi's books, *Nazi-rock: pop music e destra radicale* (Rome: Castelveccchi 1997), 198–236, provide an excellent analysis of the rise of the racist skinhead scene in Italy. Translations into English, unless otherwise stated, are by the author.

hooliganism.¹² One thing which many football hooligans and skinheads have in common is the 'A.C.A.B.' (All Cops Are Bastards) patch or tattoo, which originated on the terraces. This 'bonehead model' may still have a huge, symbolic influence on young, violent racists, even if it is not obvious that the squads of *ultras* who dominate the football terraces of Europe are authentic skinheads.

There was a further skinhead revival in the early 1980s in a rougher, more aggressive form in which the cropped, or 'number 1' haircut, was replaced by a shaved head. It was also in this decade that many British skinheads became politicized. The revival was sustained, and eventually propagated on a worldwide scale, thanks to the emergence of the Oi! music scene, itself an outgrowth of punk rock. The Oi! punk band Skrewdriver, with its charismatic vocalist Ian Stuart Donaldson, was the vector for the projection of neo-Nazi ideas represented at the time by both the National Front (NF) and the British Movement into this particular youth subculture. Donaldson, and his thuggish sidekick Nicky Crane, were themselves products of the NF and British Movement, respectively, two political groups that had developed a skinhead following in the late 1970s and early 1980s.¹³

While other white power bands were springing up in Britain, Donaldson, Crane and Skrewdriver took the message abroad by touring Belgium (1983, 1984 and 1985), Holland (1984 and 1985), Sweden (1987), Germany (1990 and 1991) and northern Italy (1991).¹⁴ Although Donaldson and Skrewdriver never crossed the Atlantic, an Oi! allied band, No Remorse, toured Canada and the United States.¹⁵ Partly as a result, other groups of racist skinheads and bands soon sprang up in Britain, Europe, North and South America and Australasia, all seeking to emulate Skrewdriver by peddling racist and neo-Nazi ideas and the skinhead 'lifestyle' in their lyrics.

A permanent organizational basis was given to the skinhead music scene, first, by the founding of RAC (Rock against Communism), the name an obvious pun on the earlier Rock against Racism movement. This was followed by the White Noise network in collaboration with the National Front and, then, when Donaldson finally fell out with his NF patrons, he established Blood & Honour in 1987.¹⁶ By the 1990s, Blood & Honour had become a

12 Mark Potok (ed.), *Skinheads in America: Racists on the Rampage*, Intelligence Report Special Edition (Montgomery, AL: Southern Poverty Law Center Publications [2009]), 6.

13 On the exploitation of the emerging skinhead subculture by Britain's far right, see Paul Wilkinson, *The New Fascists* (London: Pan Books 1983), 201.

14 See *White Skins, White Pride*, magazine published by the White Pride Organization, December 1988.

15 *Diamond in the Dust: The Ian Stuart Biography*, 17, available on the Skrewdriver website at www.skrewdriver.net/diamond.html (viewed 1 September 2016).

16 Steve Silver, 'Blood and Honour 1987–1992', in Nick Lowles and Steve Silver (eds), *White Noise: Inside the International Nazi Skinhead Scene* (London: Searchlight 1998), 10; Robert Forbes and Eddie Stampton, *The White Nationalist Skinhead Movement: UK & USA, 1979–1993* (Port Townsend, WA: Feral House 2015), 250–7.

major reference point for young neo-fascists and neo-Nazis throughout Europe who came to Britain to attend the gigs of Skrewdriver and other bands.¹⁷ As the European Parliament's Committee of Inquiry into Racism and Xenophobia reported in 1990, the racist, violent subculture of the skinhead was then 'by far the most worrying development since the last Committee of Inquiry report [in 1985]'.¹⁸

Ian Stuart Donaldson died in a car crash in September 1993 and thus became the movement's first 'martyr'. Several biographical sketches of the charismatic Skrewdriver vocalist have claimed that he was murdered by 'agents of the British State' who feared his growing popularity and influence, though there is absolutely no evidence to suggest that his death was other than an accident.¹⁹ ISD (Ian Stuart Donaldson) memorial gigs, held in September, remain a key date in the racist skinhead calendar in various countries today. 1993 was a pivotal year in the history of Blood & Honour because Nicky Crane also died, in his case of AIDS, after publicly coming out as gay and repudiating his racist, neo-Nazi past on television.²⁰

By the time of Donaldson's death, the white power music network of which he was the figurehead had already become an international movement, with offshoots in many European countries, the United States and Canada and even Australasia. But, in Britain, his death and that of Nicky Crane were body blows that left Blood & Honour vulnerable to a takeover by Combat 18, a more extreme, semi-terrorist neo-Nazi splinter group.²¹ The emergence of Combat18 led to sometimes bloody battles between the supporters of that organization and the Blood & Honour loyalists in the mid- and late 1990s, the scars of which are still visible today in the form of continuing divisions in the white power skinhead music movement worldwide.²²

The ideas of the American white supremacist right have had a huge influence on the global neo-fascist scene generally. Indeed, if Britain was the source of the racist skinhead phenomenon, then its spread to the United States was a crucial turning-point in its development as a social movement and an ideology. Across the Atlantic, young, white supremacist racists—

17 *Diamond in the Dust*, 37. In a conversation during a concert in Milan in June 2009, an Italian skinhead explained to me how he had visited London in the mid-1990s and got to know such bands as No Remorse and Chingford Attack.

18 European Parliament, *Report Drawn Up on Behalf of the Committee of Inquiry into Racism and Xenophobia on the Findings of the Committee of Inquiry* (Luxembourg: Office for Official Publications of the European Communities 1991), 46, available on the *Statewatch* website at www.statewatch.org/news/2015/jun/ep-racism-ford-report-1991.pdf (viewed 1 September 2016).

19 See, for example, *Diamond in the Dust*, 28, 41–2.

20 Healy, *Gay Skins*, 134–6.

21 Nick Lowles, *White Riot: The Violent Story of Combat 18* (Bury, Lancs.: Milo Books 2001) is the only serious study of the rise and fall of Combat 18.

22 *Ibid.*, chs 11, 13. There is still a separate, Combat 18-controlled website at www.bloodandhonour.net (viewed 1 September 2016).

often linked to the Ku Klux Klan—and neo-Nazis flocked to join emerging American skinhead groups in the 1980s and 1990s.²³

Ironically, given the history of violence between skinheads and biker gangs in the United Kingdom, in the United States some groups of skinheads adopted the culture and vocabulary of the Hells Angels. Thus, their naturally individualistic, anarchic and rebellious instincts were eventually channelled into more regimented groups organized on lines similar to those of the Hells Angels hierarchy of ‘Supporters’, ‘Hangarounds’, ‘Prospects’ or ‘Probationers’ and full members. Some skinheads may have adopted these characteristics of American gang culture while in prison: the Aryan Warriors, which is essentially a tight grouping of prison-bound white supremacists and neo-Nazis, are also structured in this way.²⁴ The largest of the organized skinhead groups is the Hammerskin Nation (founded in Dallas, Texas in 1987). The HSN, or the Hammerskins, as they are more generally known, has a tight organizational structure that is strangely at variance with the assertion on their homepage: ‘The Hammerskin Nation is a leaderless group of men and women.’²⁵

So, as well as literally dozens of skinhead groupuscules who do seem to abide by Louis Beam’s maxim of ‘leaderless resistance’,²⁶ there eventually emerged in the United States a number of skinhead *organizations* like the American Front,²⁷ Hammerskins,²⁸ and Volksfront.²⁹ While those particular groups have had no affiliation to political parties or other racial organization, Christian Identity Skins were attached to the Christian Identity-Aryan Nations movement, which is an American brand of ‘Israelitism’.³⁰ And the COTC

23 Jack B. Moore, *Skinheads Shaved for Battle: A Cultural History of American Skinheads* (Bowling Green, OH: Bowling Green University Popular Press 1993) is a comprehensive, if flawed, account of the development of the skinhead scene in the United States; there are also some useful pages in James Ridgeway, *Blood in the Face: The Ku Klux Klan, Aryan Nations, Nazi Skinheads, and the Rise of a New White Culture*, 2nd edn (New York: Thunder’s Mouth Press 1995), 181–5; see also Forbes and Stampton, *The White Nationalist Skinhead Movement*, ch. 13.

24 See ‘White prison gangs: Gang Identification Task Force’, available online at <http://whiteprisongangs.blogspot.co.uk/2009/07/aryan-warriors.html> (viewed 1 September 2016).

25 ‘Hammerskin Nation’, homepage, available online at www.hammerskins.net (viewed 1 September 2016).

26 See Martin Durham, *White Rage: The Extreme Right and American Politics* (London and New York: Routledge 2007), 103–4.

27 For an analysis of the origins of the American Front, see ‘American Front’, 2013, on the *Anti-Defamation League* website at http://archive.adl.org/learn/ext_us/american_front (viewed 1 September 2016).

28 See ‘Hammerskin Nation’ website at www.hammerskins.net (viewed 1 September 2016).

29 For a detailed but out-of-date analysis of the group, see ‘Volksfront’, [c. 2008], on the *Anti-Defamation League* website at http://archive.adl.org/learn/ext_us/volksfront (viewed 25 September 2016).

30 ‘Christian Identity’, in Jeffrey Kaplan (ed.), *Encyclopedia of White Power: A Sourcebook on the Radical Racist Right* (Walnut Creek, CA: Altamira Press 2009), 50–3.

Skins are attached to the Church of the Creator (COTC) which, despite its name, does not believe in the supernatural despite claiming to be a 'religion'.³¹ The Hammerskins, COTC and Volksfront eventually went global.

According to the official Hammerskin website, there are six chapters in the United States, and others in Canada, Italy, France, Hungary, Italy, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Luxembourg, Australia and New Zealand.³² There was also a German Hammerskin chapter until it was proscribed, along with Blood & Honour, by the government of the Federal Republic. Ironically, though the Hammerskin movement has spread across the world, support for the Hammerskins in the United States has declined in recent years, largely because they have been contested by 'outlaw' skinhead groups who refuse to kowtow to the HSN leadership. A further irony is that, in Britain, the cradle of the skinhead subculture, the Hammerskin experience was short-lived, with the British Hammerskin chapter dissolving itself by the end of the 1990s.

Volksfront, a smaller and reputedly more extreme movement than the Hammerskins, had branches in Croatia, Portugal and Spain and, briefly, Australia.³³ It tried to establish itself in the United Kingdom under the leadership of Kirk Barker, a former member of Skrewdriver Security, but failed, in part due to the opposition of Blood & Honour.³⁴ Volksfront members have a long history of convictions for violence. Suddenly, in September 2012, following the murder the previous month of six people by a neo-Nazi gunman in a Sikh temple in Oak Creek, Wisconsin, Volksfront leader Randall Lee Krager summarily dissolved the organization, claiming 'illegal harassment' by the federal authorities.³⁵ It is unclear whether some 'unofficial' groups of Volksfront members continue to exist in the United States and elsewhere.³⁶

Towards the end of the 1990s, a leading American anti-fascist commentator, Leonard Zeskind, argued: 'The sun is setting on the days of the White Power skins as a distinct subculture.'³⁷ But not quite yet. If the Hammerskins are

31 George Michael, *Theology of Hate: A History of the World Church of the Creator* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida 2009), 132–3.

32 'Hammerskin Nation', chapters, available at www.hammerskins.net/chapters.html (viewed 1 September 2016).

33 See the interview with Volksfront in 'Volksfront international', *Blood & Honour*, no. 31, January 2005, 22.

34 Alexander Gray, 'Blood and Honour challenged by new nazi alliance', *Searchlight*, February–March 2012, 27; Alexander Gray, 'Conflict besets Blood and Honour rivals', *Searchlight*, July 2012, 15.

35 For the group's rise and fall, see Heidi Bierich, 'The end of Volksfront?', *Intelligence Report*, 20 November 2013, available on the *Southern Poverty Law Center* website at www.splcenter.org/fighting-hate/intelligence-report/2013/end-volksfront (viewed 1 September 2016).

36 Ibid.

37 Leonard Zeskind, 'A bad moon rising: white power skins in America', in Lowles and Silver (eds), *White Noise*, ch. 7 (76).

taken as an example, while they may be in decline in their homeland, they are going strong in countries like Hungary, Sweden, Australia and, above all, Italy. The recent success of a 'Nazi-rock' gig organized by the Italian Hammer-skins in Milan, when they managed to bring together over 1,000 skinheads from all over Europe, testifies to the continuing efficiency of the HSN network.³⁸ So it seems that skinheads are here to stay, as a growing part of the transnational racist scene. Indeed, the Anti-Defamation League report, *The Skinhead International*, accurately describes the global reach of the racist skinhead phenomenon:

This 'Skinhead International' is maintained through the travels abroad of popular Skinhead rock bands and their fans; the world-wide marketing of Skinhead paraphernalia and recordings; the sale and trading of publications known as 'skinzines'; the wide exchange of propaganda materials and other correspondence; and, increasingly, the utilization of electronic communications.³⁹

Even if they do not actually belong to a clearly defined and organized skinhead group, many young white male racists worldwide still seek to emulate those who follow the 'skinhead way of life', a wider 'skinhead culture' that will now be thematically examined.

The culture of skinhead

The foundational myth

Part and parcel of the notion that racist skinheads are the 'vanguard' of a racial and revolutionary working class is the portrayal by various organized skinheads and their apologists of the emergence of the skinhead phenomenon out of a 'pure white', working-class context: skinheads, in their origins, were always white separatists.⁴⁰ On the other hand, reliable writers on the early skinhead movement are at one in declaring that white skinheads happily bopped alongside youths of Afro-Caribbean origin, at least in the

38 Paolo Berizzi, 'Milano, bufera sul mega-raduno neonazista Pisapia: inaccettabile che sia stato autorizzato', *La Repubblica*, 16 June 2013, 17.

39 'Findings', in Anti-Defamation League, *The Skinhead International: A Worldwide Survey of Neo-Nazi Skinheads* (New York: Anti-Defamation League 1995); the 'Findings' are available on the Nizkor website at www.nizkor.org/hweb/orgs/american/adl/skinhead-international/skins-findings.html (viewed 1 September 2016).

40 See, for example, the statement by a COTC Skins spokesperson in 'Frequently asked questions about skinheads', available on the *Meta-religion* website at www.meta-religion.com/Extremism/White_extremism/Skinheads/frequently_asked_questions_about.htm (viewed 2 September 2016). It is indicative of the commentator's ignorance of Britain in 1970s and 1980s that he talks of skinheads 'riding around looking for a Paki to bash'.

early years of the skinhead subculture.⁴¹ Admittedly, that period of coexistence in the 1970s was short-lived and the radical right-wing political orientation of a substantial number of British skinheads became progressively dominant. The myth of the pure white racial origins of the skinhead phenomenon is, nevertheless, endlessly repeated in skinzines around the globe: the truth is inconvenient, indeed impossible to swallow, for many racist skinheads.

'Skinhead: a way of life'

This is a key slogan of racist (and other) skinheads and it has a range of meanings. The most obvious is to do with the wearing of the racist skinhead 'uniform'—shaved heads, black bomber jackets, tight bleached jeans or combat pants and heavy, often steel toe-capped boots—and their aggressive 'attitude' towards non-skinheads, which naturally sets them apart from the rest of society. Another propagated image is of being clean-living, drug-free, heterosexual, working-class males, as well as females, that is, skin girls. Homophobia and hostility to any form of drug-taking—except tobacco and alcohol—are constants across the racist, neo-Nazi scene, but especially pronounced among skinheads. This 'puritanical' stance has its origins in the British working-class skinhead subculture, which was itself a response to, and rejection of, the more fashionable mod subculture as well as the hippy, hedonistic culture in Britain in the 1960s and 1970s.⁴² Skinheads, by contrast, tended to identify many aspects of the permissive society or sexual revolution as 'perversions'.

In the United States this 'way of life' also merges with the 'straight edge' ethos in hardcore American punk music.⁴³ But many skinheads pay only lip-service to the 'straight edge' code, hence the need for organizations like the Hammerskins, Volksfront and other groups to curb the heavy drinking bouts characteristic of the skinhead scene. Scandals over drug-taking and drug-dealing, and even the outing of homosexuals, occasionally rock the racist skinhead movement. In Italy, this 'way of life' has been elevated almost to the status of an ideology of its own among the country's oldest organized skinhead group Veneto Fronte Skins. Sergio Gozzoli, a veteran of

41 See, for example, Nick Knight, *Skinhead* (London: Omnibus Press 1982), 13–15; Jeffrey M. Bale, 'Skinhead fascism', in Cyprian P. Blamires (ed.), *World Fascism: A Historical Encyclopedia*, 2 vols (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO 2006), 602–5; Potok (ed.), *Skinheads in America*, 3; and Marshall, *Spirit of '69*, 21–9, where he explains that there were 'caribs', i.e. West Indians, in a number of London skinhead gangs who went 'Paki-bashing' and that West Indian reggae was the favoured music of skinheads in the late 1960s and early 1970s.

42 Clarke, 'Football hooliganism and the skinheads', 13.

43 'Straight edge' in the United States can also be anti-fascist: see XsaraqaëlX, 'The antifa straight edge: a manifesto', 2001, available on the *Alpine Anarchist* website at www.alpineanarchist.org/pamphlets/antifa_straight_edge.html (viewed 2 September 2016).

Mussolini's war-time Repubblica Sociale Italiana (Italian Social Republic) and one of the ideologues of the skinhead movement in northeastern Italy, posited the 'ideology of the four "nos": "No to drugs, no to immigrants, no to Communists and no to gays."' ⁴⁴

This puritanical element in the skinhead lifestyle involves strong notions of 'normality' and 'naturalness'. A researcher into the activities of a group of Finnish skinheads explains accordingly: 'One of the central notions in skinhead ideology is the idea of naturalness, from which e.g. [sic] [the] following notions are derived ... a further aim of skinheads is to eliminate all abnormalities like, homosexuals, lesbians and other kinds of "sick" and "deviant" people.' ⁴⁵ This analysis could be applied to skinheads in most countries. Like broader sections of society, skinheads often confuse, or at least associate, paedophilia with homosexuality. Abortion (though not contraception) is also usually regarded with particular hostility by skinheads. Yet it is not clear whether this is part of a broader conservative backlash against feminism and the sexual revolution, and therefore support for traditional 'family values', or more specifically the result of racial thinking, as it was in Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy. A paranoid preoccupation with the numerical decline of the white race—encapsulated in the slogan '9 per cent', meaning only 9 per cent of the world's population is white and the figure is diminishing—would suggest that it is a bit of both.

Skinhead culture presents an extreme example of the cult of heterosexual hyper-masculinity. ⁴⁶ It is obvious from attending white power gigs, or examining photographs of them in skinzines and on websites, that women are few and far between at these transnational events. In Britain, France and Germany women attend gigs very rarely and then usually in the company of their boyfriends. On the other hand, a female presence is more frequent at gigs in Italy, and sometimes entire families are present at the Aryan Fest and Nordic Fest gatherings in the United States. The most perceptive exploration to date of the roles played by women in the racist skinhead scene is provided by Kathleen Blee. On the one hand, she reveals the prevailing misogyny and sexism of those on the American racist skinhead scene while, on the other, she suggests that not all women accept the traditional, docile 'girlie' role generally expected of them. Instead, Blee finds that some women participants are as aggressive

44 Paolo Berizzi, *Bande Nere: come vivono, chi sono, chi protegge I nuovi nazifascisti* (Milan: Bompiani 2009), 257.

45 Formerly available online at www.cc.joensuu.fi/~vpuurone.htm (viewed 22 September 2011).

46 It is ironic, therefore, that, in spite of the violent hostility to gays and lesbians, some observers, even otherwise very well-informed ones, have made the mistake of confusing the *homosociality* of skinheads, i.e. the intense male bonding and the close camaraderie that is often expressed physically, like that of footballers, with *homosexuality*: see, for example, Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke, *Black Sun: Aryan Cults, Esoteric Nazism and the Politics of Identity* (New York: New York University Press 2002), 224.

and violent as the men.⁴⁷ Nevertheless, evidence of any assimilation of notions of female equality into the culture of some racist skinhead groups is difficult to find.⁴⁸

'Skinhead: a way of life' also fundamentally points towards the skinhead as *warrior* or street fighter. Among the commonest skinhead tattoos are those of Vikings (or Bersekers, the elite of Viking warriors), of Second World War German soldiers (especially the Waffen-SS) and of skinheads themselves. Indeed, a common skinhead tattoo brings all three together. As a T-shirt popular among Italian skinheads claims, they are 'sempre pronti per al fight' (always ready for a fight, note the use of an English word). The true skinhead is supposed to be a born street fighter, as epitomized by one of the key mottos of American skinheads: 'Skinheads Shaved for Battle'.⁴⁹ This provides an ideological rationale for the skinhead propensity to violence, those physical confrontations with the 'enemy', like 'nigger stomping', 'Paki bashing', 'queer bashing', attacks on Jews, 'whiggers' (race-mixers), immigrants and, more recently, paedophiles. Some racist skinheads have justified this on purely defensive grounds, like the member of Rome's SPQR Skinheads who claimed in an interview for the *Guardian*: 'I'm not afraid if anyone wants to fight me, but I don't go out looking for a fight. We're more interested in survival.'⁵⁰

There is a real sense in which it can be said that racist skinheads are carrying on the fascist historical tradition of regarding it as both their right and *duty* to employ violence for political ends. A Danish White Pride skinhead interviewed in 2007, for instance, is reported as saying: 'Politicians think they can sort problems by talking. We act more violently.'⁵¹ Countless lyrics of white power bands have hammered out the message that racial pride means fighting their enemies: Valerio Marchi provides a frightening selection of such lyrics from German bands in the early 1990s.⁵² These lyrics are occasionally to be found in publications crystallizing the message of the absolute imperative of racial violence. One such text is the Combat 18 manifesto from the early 1990s that called for the shipping of 'all non-Whites back to Africa, Asia or Arabia alive or in body-bags, the choice is theirs', the execution of all 'queers' and 'White race mixers', and the execution 'of all jews [*sic*] who have actively helped to damage the White race and to put into camps the rest until we find a final solution for the eternal jew'.⁵³

47 Kathleen M. Blee, *Inside Organised Racism: Women in the Hate Movement* (Berkeley: University of California Press 2002), 178–82.

48 *Ibid.*, 144–9.

49 See also Moore, *Skinheads Shaved for Battle*, fn20.

50 Quoted in Gianluca Di Feo, 'Skinheads in Italy: the rage of a young Italian fascist', *Guardian*, 18 July 2014.

51 *En rapport om White Pride og Vederfølnere* (Aarhus: Redox 2008), 42.

52 Marchi, *Nazi-rock*, 187–9.

53 As quoted in *Diamond in the Dust*, 42.

As in other aspects of the transnational phenomenon, the North American extreme right has furnished much of the ideological force behind the racist skinhead cult of violence. The Canadian band, RaHoWa (Racial Holy War) and the American band Intimidation One have both preached hate against Jews and Blacks, encouraging skinhead violence, since the 1990s. The vision of racial violence as race war takes its most extreme form in the novels of William Pierce, especially *The Turner Diaries*, which tells of a great upsurge of racial cleansing by white men that not only sweeps America and Europe but spreads to Africa and Asia as well. This novel has been a powerful inspiration for racist skinhead gangs outside of the United States: some leaders of Combat18 regarded it as their 'bible'.⁵⁴

Odinism

The religion of the Norse or German gods and associated forms of paganism are particularly popular among skinheads, precisely because of their violent, warrior ethos. Skinzines, and especially *Blood & Honour* magazine, frequently point out that Odinism is a *religion of warriors*, whereas despised Christianity is presented in Nietzschean terms as a *religion of slaves*.⁵⁵ Odinism appears to be one of the fastest growing cults in contemporary America. Some Odinist organizations, like Odin Brotherhood and Wotan's Folk, are explicitly racist and some have followers among right-wing groups.⁵⁶ Skinzines and skinhead websites are saturated with Odinist imagery, runes and pictures of warring Vikings, while Thor's Hammer jewellery or jacket patches are also popular among racist skinheads.

Odinism is a strong cultic element among racist skinheads not only in North America but also in northwest Europe judging by the names of some of the bands: Eye of Odin (Britain), Midgards Soner (Sweden), Odin's Law (Canada), Sleipnir (Germany) and Freya (France). There is also a band in Chile called Odal Sieg. Other skinhead bands have likewise been influenced by Odinist tropes, even Skrewdriver.⁵⁷

54 Andrew MacDonald (i.e. William Pierce), *The Turner Diaries* (Hillsboro, WV: National Vanguard Books 1978).

55 There are references to Odinism in virtually every issue of *Blood & Honour* since its inception in 1989; 'Odinism: folk, faith, family', *Blood & Honour*, no. 27, September 2003, 8, contains the declaration: 'The natural religion for the Indo-European peoples (often called Northern Europeans) is what is today called Odinism.'

56 On Odin Brotherhood, see the official website, <http://odinbrotherhood.webs.com/ourbeliefs.htm> (viewed 5 September 2016); on Wotan's Folk, see David Williams, 'Tom Gower and friends', *Searchlight*, July 2010, 20–1. Just as not all skinheads are racist neither are all Odinists; see the repudiation of racialism and Nazism in the pamphlet *Heathens and Heathen Faith: Some Frequently Asked Questions* (New Haven, CT: The Troth 2010), 2.

57 *Diamond in the Dust*, 28.

Among skinheads in Slavic countries there has also been a tendency to appropriate elements of pre-Christian religious mythologies, including ancient Slavonic religions. A skinhead interviewed in Poland in 1992 declared: 'The Church tells us to love everybody. I don't love the f*****g Church. I have my own Slavic God. Światowid is not merciful, he's just.'⁵⁸ Similarly, there has been a revival of interest in Slavic gods in both Russia and the Ukraine. In the latter country, there is a notorious neo-Nazi band called Sokyra Perun.⁵⁹ Perun is the Slavic god of thunder and lightning, and is usually represented by an axe or hammer.

The appropriation of Odinist/pagan imagery and iconography by racist skinheads seems to be largely symbolic, rather than a serious attempt to adopt an alternative religion to Christianity. The description of a band member going down in prayer to Odin before of the start of a gig—Micky Lane of Eye of Odin—suggests that this gesture left the bulk of those present a little embarrassed.⁶⁰ The embracing of Odinism therefore seems to be essentially a case of 'belonging rather than believing', a typical example of the appropriation of symbols for identitarian purposes.

In any case, Odinism and other forms of paganism are much less popular in countries like Spain and Italy where Catholicism is still the default religious culture. In a study of Milanese skinheads in 1993, Maurizio Blondet found a continuing attachment to Catholicism—typified by such comments as 'Dio c'è' (God exists) and 'Un popolo senza fede comune non é un popolo, é massa' (A people without a common faith is not a people; it is just a mass)—and even a collective presence of skinheads at church on Sunday.⁶¹ The situation does not seem to have changed much over the last twenty years: participants at rock concerts organized over the last four years at the Skinhouse, the headquarters of Italian Hammerskins in Bollate (Milan province), have shown little sign of Odinist symbols in jewellery, badges or tattoos. Similarly, in the United States, there has actually been a Christian Identity skinhead band, the skinhead organization Confederate Hammerskins, and another band, Bound for Glory, that was also originally associated with the Christian Identity-Aryan Nation movement.⁶² In other words, they are 'Christianist' rather than Christian, but certainly not pagan. In Poland, in the 1990s, there was a

58 Quoted in Paul Hokenos, *Free to Hate: The Rise of the Right in Post-Communist Eastern Europe* (London and New York: Routledge 1993), 266. Światowid is a god of war, fertility and abundance.

59 See the 'Sokyr Peruna interview', trans. from the Russian by Krill, 16 October 2010, available on the *NS Revolt* website at <http://revoltns.blogspot.co.uk/2010/10/sokyraperuna-interview.html> (viewed 5 September 2016).

60 'Skewed', *Searchlight*, October 2002, 4–5.

61 Maurizio Blondet, *I nuovi barbari: gli skinheads parlano* (Milan: Effedieffe 1993), 144, 151.

62 See the article on 'Christian Identity', on the *Wikipedia* website at https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christian_Identity (viewed 25 September 2016). Bound for Glory is now Odinist in sympathies.

skinhead band (Legion) associated with the Christian, antisemitic right that had no truck with Odinism or other pagan religions.⁶³

The interest in Odinism and paganism should be seen against the background of a general neo-Nazi interest in heroic, epic mythologies, such as the extraordinary fascination of British skinhead bands with Arthurian legends—Avalon and Camelot—and Ian Stuart Donaldson's almost obsessive interest in J. R. R. Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings*.⁶⁴ There has been a similar obsession among Italian neo-Fascists since the end of the 1970s with *The Hobbit*. The first national gathering of Italian neo-Fascist youth was, in fact, held at 'Campo Hobbit' in the summer of 1977.⁶⁵

The skinhead as victim

Persecuted and oppressed by the 'police states' of the liberal democracies and demonized by their media, the skinhead frequently presents himself as a victim. Thus tattoos of the 'crucified skin' are extremely common among racist skinheads.⁶⁶ Both Blood & Honour and Combat18 have constructed a cult of martyrdom around Ian Stuart Donaldson, sedulously propagating the conspiracy theory that he was the victim of a political 'assassination'. According to Paul Jackson: '... Donaldson has been re-configured as a secular saint for the neo-Nazi cause.'⁶⁷ His photograph is prominently displayed, with those of Rudolf Hess and other, more recent, local 'martyrs of the White Race', alongside national flags, and National Socialist and racial flags, like the Celtic Cross, in a sort of 'shrine' behind the band at racist skinhead gigs. This is arguably as much a form of the 'sacralization of politics' as the cult of the martyrs of the 1923 *Bierkeller* putsch in Nazi Germany,⁶⁸ or that of the Fascist *squadristi* who fell in reactionary attacks against socialists and other enemies during and following the *Biennio Rosso* in Italy. Another common skinhead motto, that goes hand-in-hand with the 'crucified skinhead' theme, is 'hated but proud', expressing the feeling of belonging to an exclusive, closed, disliked but feared group in much the same way as Millwall hooligans proudly chant, 'Nobody likes us but we don't care'.⁶⁹ The 'victim'

63 Rafal Pankowski, 'Nazi music in Poland', in Lowles and Silver, *White Noise*, 65–9 (66).

64 *Diamond in the Dust*, 32.

65 *Mensile di Area*, April 2007, 38–41.

66 It is common among other skinheads to resent what they regard as the adverse media image of *all* skinheads.

67 Paul Jackson, "'The hooked-cross, the symbol of re-awakening life': the memory of Ian Stuart Donaldson", in Anton Shekhovtsov and Paul Jackson (eds), *White Power Music: Scenes of Extreme-Right Cultural Resistance* (Ilford: Searchlight Magazine/ Northampton: Radicalism and New Media Group 2012), 85–100 (100).

68 Michael Burleigh, *The Third Reich: A New History* (London: Macmillan 2000), 364–5.

69 CasaPound, one of the fastest growing neo-Fascist groups in Italy, calls The Cutty Sark pub in Rome, one of its meeting places, 'il piu' odiato pub d'Italia' (the most hated pub in Italy).

syndrome raises some interesting *psychological* as well as ideological questions.

Skinheads as the vanguard of working-class male, racist revolutionaries

This is perhaps the most interesting and most original of racist skinhead ideologies. It constituted the core of Volksfront propaganda; the group's website billed it as 'the independent voice of the white working class ... working for the working class since 1994!' Similarly, the American Front skinhead organization and its band Stormtroop 16 claim: 'American Front has been serving the White Worker since 1984.'

The myth of the skinhead as a part of a working-class revolutionary vanguard is consonant with the socioeconomic background of many skinheads. According to John Clarke: 'The skinheads' creation of a style involved a reassertion of the old traditions, a defence of that culture which seemed threatened with contamination by middle class styles and values.'⁷⁰ He also points out:

Ten or so years after the first skinhead 'wave', skinhead style and subculture were recreated to withstand what was felt to be the threat to British culture and working class values from the immigrants, from Asians of the subcontinent and East Africa. Now race, rather than strictly class, was the issue.⁷¹

The racist skinhead phenomenon in the United Kingdom remains overwhelmingly working class, and this does not just apply to the older skinheads who founded the Blood & Honour movement.⁷² It also applies to more recent recruits to the scene: this is clear from skinzines, especially *Blood & Honour*, and from skinhead websites.⁷³ The classic stereotype of the skinhead as a disaffected, young, white working-class male still has much validity in post-industrial Britain, the United States and other countries. A defector from Germany's neo-Nazi party, the Nationaldemokratische Partei Deutschlands (NPD), described many of the younger members of the party as follows:

When you went along to evening meetings, you saw all the shaven heads, and the black sun or other Nazi symbols tattooed on arms ... Many just have an IQ close to my shoe size. Most of them are simply failures: failed pupils, many who have dropped out of school or their apprenticeship.⁷⁴

70 Clarke, 'Football hooliganism and the skinheads', 13.

71 Ibid.

72 See Forbes and Stampton, *The White Nationalist Skinhead Movement*, chs 1–3.

73 This was also confirmed by 'Dave', interview with the author, 13 May 2005.

74 Quoted in Allan Hall, 'Neo-Nazis plotting "Fourth Reich" in Germany', *Telegraph*, 26 February 2009.

The skinhead working-class myth is not, however, shared by all groups. The Hammerskins stress the inter-class nature of their movement, even if the 'working class' element comes first in the list: 'The Hammerskin Nation is a leaderless group of men and women who have adopted the White Power Skinhead lifestyle. We are blue collar workers, white collar professionals, college students, entrepreneurs, fathers and mothers.'⁷⁵ Ultimately, the Hammerskin message may be a more realistic position in the post-industrial and postmodern age, a more effective way of mobilizing opposition to the globalized, capitalist, multicultural society of the West.⁷⁶ In Italy, some skinhead groups seem to include many members with middle- and lower middle-class, rather than working-class backgrounds, like the Italian chapter of Hammerskins in Milan province or SPQR Skinheads in Rome. Nevertheless, the leader of the Veneto Fronte Skinheads in the Northeast claimed: 'We are the working class, the people who work.'⁷⁷ A survey conducted in 1993 of skinheads in Milan, the precursors of the Skinhouse, found that only 20 per cent came from the working class, and 27 per cent were students.⁷⁸ In the case of SPQR Skinheads, their leader Fulvio, in a recent interview, spoke of a very disparate membership: 'There are all sorts: manual workers and architecture students, lawyers and mechanics.'⁷⁹ This statement, and the impression gained by attendance at white power music concerts in 2010 and 2013, suggest that the Italian situation has not changed much since the 1990s.⁸⁰

National Socialism

In part because of its historical origins in the National Front and British Movement, the racist skinhead ideology is fundamentally neo-Nazi in inspiration. One telling example is the name given to the white power band network, Blood & Honour, which was taken from the motto of the Hitlerjugend, *Blut und Ehre*. There is also evidence that former Nazis, especially members of the SS, acted as mentors for emerging groups of racist skinheads in East and West Germany in the 1980s and 1990s.⁸¹ But just how far individual members of racist skinhead groups understand the original ideology of

75 'Hammerskin Nation', homepage, available online at www.hammerskins.net (viewed 6 September 2016).

76 For Zeskind's claim that many early American skinheads 'invented a working-class identity for their movement', see Zeskind, 'A bad moon rising', 71.

77 Quoted in Berizzi, *Bande Nere*, 250.

78 Blondet, *I nuovi barbari*, 166.

79 Quoted in Di Feo, 'Skinheads in Italy'.

80 Valerio Marchi, *SMV: stile maschio violento: i demoni di fine millennio* (Genoa: Costa & Nolan 1994), 71 draws attention to the '... unsurprising presence of middle-class youths among the Nazi-skin given that Italian neo-Fascism has always been an essentially bourgeois-student phenomenon'.

81 Ingo Hasselbach (with Tom Reiss), *Führer-Ex: Memoirs of a Former Neo-Nazi* (London: Chatto & Windus 1996), 3–6.

German National Socialism is another matter. In some cases, the identification with Nazism amounts to little more than a delight in wearing swastika and SS badges and tattoos, including the slogan *Meine Ehre heisst Treue* (My Honour Is Loyalty), or giving the Hitler salute. Nevertheless, the hailing of the band with an outstretched arm salute by large numbers of skinheads at white power gigs creates a powerful sense of 'communion' and can be a sight frighteningly reminiscent of Nuremberg and other Nazi rallies.

In countries like Italy and Hungary, with their own indigenous fascist traditions, *German* National Socialism by no means has a monopoly on skinhead ideology. The personalities and ideas of Italian Fascism and the Arrow Cross movement still exert strong influences among Italian and Hungarian skinheads, respectively. The average fascist skinhead in Italy still identifies more readily with Mussolini than Hitler, even if he calls himself a *Nazi-fascista*.⁸² But just as 'the lure of the jackboot' is a powerful, even universal fetish, so the obsessive, nostalgic interest in Nazi Germany's military exploits during the Second World War remains strong across the racist right in general, but especially among racist skinheads. The CD covers of white power bands are filled with images of the Wehrmacht's war-time operations, and white power songs regularly hark back to that conflict.⁸³ One example is that of Landser, the German band that has been proscribed and its members imprisoned by the federal authorities in Germany: their song, 'Stalingrad, Heilige Stadt' (Stalingrad, Holy City), commemorates that decisive battle from the neo-Nazi German point of view.⁸⁴

Race, racism and racialism

With 'racialism' taken to mean an *ideology* of race, these views are, of course, at the heart of the ideologies of skinhead. Yet it is no longer in the strict, classical Nazi racial tradition of a hierarchy of races: Aryan, Slav, Semitic and Hamitic (African). The Aryan, Semitic and Hamitic elements do, of course, remain. Indeed, the antisemitism is stronger than ever before. Racist skinhead attitudes towards the Holocaust range all the way from outright denial, to a minimization of numbers, to wholehearted approval, as in the lyrics of bands such as No Remorse ('Jew-boys need cyclone [*sic*] B; queer-boys need cyclone B, nigger-boys need cyclone B') or Warhammer ('Die Jew, Die').⁸⁵

82 It is significant in this regard that the Skinhouse in Bollate (Milan province), the centre of Hammerskin Nation in Italy, proudly displays a bust of Mussolini but not of Hitler.

83 Italian white power bands, in the imagery they employ and in their lyrics, also hark back to Fascist Italy's experience in the Second World War, but less so, probably because the Italian armed forces had little military success during the conflict.

84 A cover version (by Stigger and Friends), entitled 'Stalingrad', is available on *Blood & Honour. Volume Two* (ISD Records, CD1170, UK, 1996), track 20.

85 *Guardian*, 28 October 1996, 5; 'Warhammer forged in hate', *Searchlight*, April 2000, 18–19.

Twentieth-century myths about Jewish control of both Communism and international finance have now mutated into the idea of ZOG (Zionist Organized (or Occupied) Government). This powerful, paranoid conspiracy theory, held in common by much of the racist right, perceives Jewish financiers as being at the helm of all the major governments and corporations on the planet, with a particular dominance over the media.⁸⁶

In contrast, the Nazi prejudice and discrimination against Slav *Untermenschen* has been largely abandoned. There are several reasons for this. First, the presence of a strong second-, third- and fourth-generation Slav immigrant population in big American cities, like Chicago, Milwaukee, Philadelphia and Portland, where skinhead gangs initially emerged in the 1980s. There is also the powerful influence that American white supremacist ideas have had on the racist right worldwide, encapsulated in David Lane's famous 'Fourteen Words', originally derived from Hitler's *Mein Kampf*: 'We must secure the existence of our people and a future for White children.' This has focused the racist imagination almost exclusively on white (non-Semitic) racial purity. Third, because the racist skinhead culture has taken root in Slav countries—such as Poland, Belarus, the Ukraine, Russia, Bulgaria, the Czech and Slovak republics, Serbia, Slovenia and Croatia—the European racist skinhead scene is now numerically as much eastern as western.⁸⁷ Since its inception in 1989, *Blood & Honour* magazine has always treated Slavs as full members of the Aryan race. It seems inexplicable that, in 2003, nearly twenty-five years later, Combat 18 should have seen fit to publish a long article on its website entitled 'The Slav Debate (That Shouldn't Be)',⁸⁸ because there was no evidence from other sources at the time of any such 'debate' within the racist skinhead scene in the United States, Britain or Europe.

In the face of the perceived threats of the racial 'mongrelization' and 'Islamization' of Europe, and even lingering fears of a return to Communism, another slogan has arisen in Europe (including Britain), 'No more brothers' wars', evoking the core idea of a pan-European Aryan race.⁸⁹ This notion of Europe as an Aryan redoubt was regularly celebrated at the Sons of Europe white power gig in Hungary, held yearly in either July or August and organized by German and Hungarian Hammerskins.

Blood & Honour likewise took up the cause of an Aryan Europe in 1999. In particular, it began to publicize the role played in the fight against 'Judeo-

86 For an explanation of the operations of ZOG, see 'What is "ZOG"?', available on the *Skrewdriver* website at www.skrewdriver.net/zog.html (viewed 6 September 2016).

87 *Blood & Honour* was quick to recognize this; see 'East Europe awakes', *Blood & Honour*, no. 11, July 1991, 6, which is a positive assessment of white power skinheads in Poland, Hungary and Czechoslovakia.

88 'The Slav debate (that shouldn't be)', [2003], available on the *Skrewdriver* website at www.skrewdriver.net/slav.html (viewed 6 September 2016).

89 *Blood & Honour*'s worries about Islamists and Islamic terrorism actually pre-date 9/11; see 'The Harley column of the mad NS biker', *Blood & Honour*, no. 22, July 2001, 20. The magazine has served up a steady diet of Islamophobia ever since.

Bolshevism' by the Waffen-SS, which comprised 'national' divisions from France, Belgium (Flanders and Wallonia), the Netherlands, Denmark, Norway and so on, as well as German and other international divisions: 'Many great men [of the Waffen-SS] died fighting to stop the communist tide ... We should not forget this and we should not allow self-hating leftists denigrate the memory of a pan-European force which contained volunteers from all nations.'⁹⁰ Thereafter, the magazine published articles on the various national divisions of the Waffen-SS, including one on the rather small British contingent, the POWs of British Free Corps.⁹¹ Other skinzines, websites and stalls at white power gigs are awash with Waffen-SS insignia and, since the 1980s, there have been international gatherings of racist skinheads at the war cemetery in Diksmuide, Belgium to commemorate the dead of the Waffen-SS.⁹² Hundreds of skinheads from all over Europe attend another annual event, the 'Day of Honour', commemorating the Waffen-SS defence of a Russian-besieged Budapest from 29 December 1944 to 13 February 1945.⁹³

Rudolf Hess, who was, for the neo-Nazis, 'martyred' by the Allies at the end of the Second World War, also plays a key role in the myth of Europe as an Aryan continent, in opposition to the hated European Union. Marches to commemorate Rudolf Hess's death attended by skinheads of different nationalities are frequent in both Germany and Scandinavia and he is, appropriately enough, seen as the 'patron saint' of British-German Aryan 'friendship' because he made a solo flight to Britain in May 1941 (allegedly to negotiate peace).

Transnational cooperation between racist skinheads has not, however, always been easy. In the early to mid-1990s, echoes of ethnic strife were to be found in *Blood & Honour* magazine after the civil wars broke out in the former Yugoslavia.⁹⁴ Despite these fairly localized nationalist tensions and the fact that racist skinheads still talk about being 'nationalists', their primary and overriding concern is *race*, that is, the survival of a race that, according to their calculations, has been reduced to only 9 per cent of the

90 'Written for Blood and Honour by Paul-C, May, 1999', *Blood & Honour*, no. 16, June 1999, 23.

91 'Eric Pleasants British Freikorps, 191–26.7.98', *Blood & Honour*, no. 15, 1999, 13–14.

92 Wilkinson, *The New Fascists*, 86; *White Skins, White Pride*, 15.

93 See J. Arthur White, 'Bomb threat, clashes at far-right "day of honour" rally', *Budapest Times*, 15 February 2014.

94 For example, 'Long live Croatia', *Blood & Honour*, no. 13, April 1992, 9; 'I think all Serbs should be exterminated, don't you?', *Blood & Honour*, no. 14, August 1992, 14; and article on the need for an end to Ustaša (Croat) and Chetnik (Serb) differences, *Blood & Honour*, no. 15, 1999, 11. In the May 2009 issue, the themes of Islamophobia and European Aryan unity come together: 'meanwhile in the surrounding area Muslim terrorists continued planning our nations [sic] death and destruction unhindered' ('Live assaults', *Blood & Honour*, no. 42, May 2009, 22). The message is reinforced in the following issue in 'Nationalism today', *Blood & Honour*, no. 43, April 2010, 5.

world's population. Another Volksfront motto summed up this point of view: 'Race Over All'.

As one would expect, social Darwinism goes hand in hand with racism. 'No mercy for the weak' is the attitude of many skinheads, not only in relation to disabled people and defenceless enemies: according to Katherine Blee, it is also their attitude towards fellow-skinheads during the 'moshing' or violent slam dancing at gigs in the United States.⁹⁵ 'Only the strong survive' is another leitmotif of skinzines and white power songs. There are also frequent 'Nietzschean' allusions in the lyrics of white power bands, and these chime in with an often naked hostility to Christianity. The references are rendered most explicitly in the actual names of a number of white power bands. Many such bands have also played a version of the Skrewdriver song 'Triumph of the Will', including, for example, Vinland Warriors (Canada), Das Reich (USA) and Buldok (Czech Republic).

Generally speaking, skinzines and racist skinhead websites are not given to discussing complex, sophisticated political ideas. That said, *Resistance*, the publication founded by George Burdi (aka Hawthorne), has over the years contained more considered essays on the ideology and tactics of racials.⁹⁶ Only very occasionally do these major sources of inspiration for racist skinheads seek to procure wisdom taken from an external fount. One such occasion was when *Blood & Honour* published in its entirety an English translation of 'Pourquoi sommes nous des soldats politiques?' (Why are we political soldiers?) by Rodolphe Lussac, a dissident from the French right-wing intellectual tendency Nouvelle Droite.⁹⁷ Unfortunately, there is no way of gauging the impact on the readers of the magazine of this very sophisticated analysis of the dilemmas facing radical right-wing political militants in revolt against the modern, global order because the next issue does not contain any feedback. One suspects that, with its raft of literary allusions to everyone from Augustus to Max Weber, it might well have gone over the heads of most of them.

For further research

There is much scope for further research on the defining and mobilizing ideas of racist skinheads, particularly through further examination of their material

95 Blee, *Inside Organised Racism*, 182.

96 See, for example, Kevin Alfred Strom, 'Separation or annihilation', *Free Speech*, October 1995, on skinheads' relations with the African American community; and Robert Theodor, 'Hearts of hate', *Resistance: The Music Magazine of the True Alternative*, no. 8, n.d., 34–7, an exposition of the racialist vision of human nature. It should also be noted that Italian skinzines are more intellectually weighty than their British counterparts.

97 'Why are we political soldiers?', *Blood & Honour*, no. 46, February 2012, 14–15.

and musical cultures.⁹⁸ As far as music is concerned, Ian Stuart Donaldson rightly grasped that nowadays it is extremely effective as a means of selling ideas to young people.

More research is also required on other factors that motivate individuals and groups to accept these ideas in the first place. Accordingly, another fruitful approach might be more work in the areas of social anthropology and social psychology. Such research might elucidate the changing economic and social background of cohorts of racist skinheads over the last forty years or so in various countries, exploring more fully how their shared ideas reflect the psychologies of skinheads as both individuals and groups. In particular, it would address questions about the possibility of a psychological predisposition to accept racist and associated ideas by young people as opposed to the influence of family, friends and other environmental factors in that process.⁹⁹

The pre-existing fascist traditions of Hungary, Germany and Italy—especially Italy with its uninterrupted post-war history of neo-Fascism—may go a long way towards explaining the ease of recruitment of young people in those ‘national revanchist’ countries to racist and neo-Nazi ideas. But it is much more difficult to explain the attraction of such ideas in countries like Britain, the United States, Norway and even France. Here, in embracing these ideas, the recruit to skinhead racism is obliged to go against the grain: to reject the prevailing popular historical culture rooted in victory over the fascist dictatorships in the Second World War. In both cases, however, the effectiveness of the educational system in teaching the history of Nazism and fascism and their crimes is crucially important.

‘Adolescent ‘rebellion’—like the wearing of Nazi regalia by motorcycle gangs in the 1960s and punk rockers in the 1970s—involving the desire to be different and to shock, and thus reject prevailing societal norms, probably plays some part in the decision to wear neo-Nazi or racist symbols or even to adopt the ideas that they represent. This may be true in any country and the example of East Germany is particularly instructive in this regard: racism and sympathy for National Socialism on the part of many young people make sense as a form of rebellion against state-imposed Communism in a country where there was no democratic outlet for opposition to the regime.¹⁰⁰ Since the German Democratic Republic was avowedly and insistently ‘anti-fascist’, adopting a racist or an openly neo-Nazi stance was seen by many young people as the best form of revolt against it.

Other motivating factors for joining racist skinhead groups are likely to be much the same as those inspiring people to join any transgressive youth

98 With regard to music, a lot of work is already being done; see Lowles and Silver (eds), *White Noise* and Shekhovstov and Jackson (eds), *White Power Music*.

99 A model for this kind of work is Michael Billig, *Fascists: A Social Psychological View of the National Front* (London and New York: Academic Press 1978).

100 Hasselbach, *Führer-Ex*, ch. 2.

subculture, such as street gangs, 'outlaw biker gangs' and football hooligan 'firms'. Football hooligans have tended towards the political right and, in some cases, the racist, fascist right, the most obvious example being the 'Chelsea Headhunters', whose members provided many of the recruits to Combat 18.¹⁰¹ The comparison with football hooligan firms—with which racist skinhead groups have much in common and with which they have overlapped throughout the history of the skinhead subculture—is a very useful one. In this regard, Norbert Elias and Eric Dunning have drawn attention to the 'quest for excitement in advanced societies' and have claimed that 'the increased routine-ization of everyday life has reduced the frequency of extraordinary incident, and has also increasingly demanded restrictions on the expression of emotion in public'.¹⁰² This would help explain the hooligan psychology and may also provide a key to understanding the attraction of young people, especially young males, to the racist skinhead scene and its endemic violence, as well as their consequent transition to the acceptance of increasingly radical ideas. These are some of the avenues of research that it would be worthwhile to explore in order to understand how racist skinhead groups succeed in giving some young men (and women) a sense of belonging, empowerment, identity and meaning in their lives.

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101 Lowles, *White Riot*, ch. 6.

102 Norbert Elias and Eric Dunning, *The Quest for Excitement: Sport and Leisure in the Civilising Process* (Oxford and New York: Blackwell 1986).